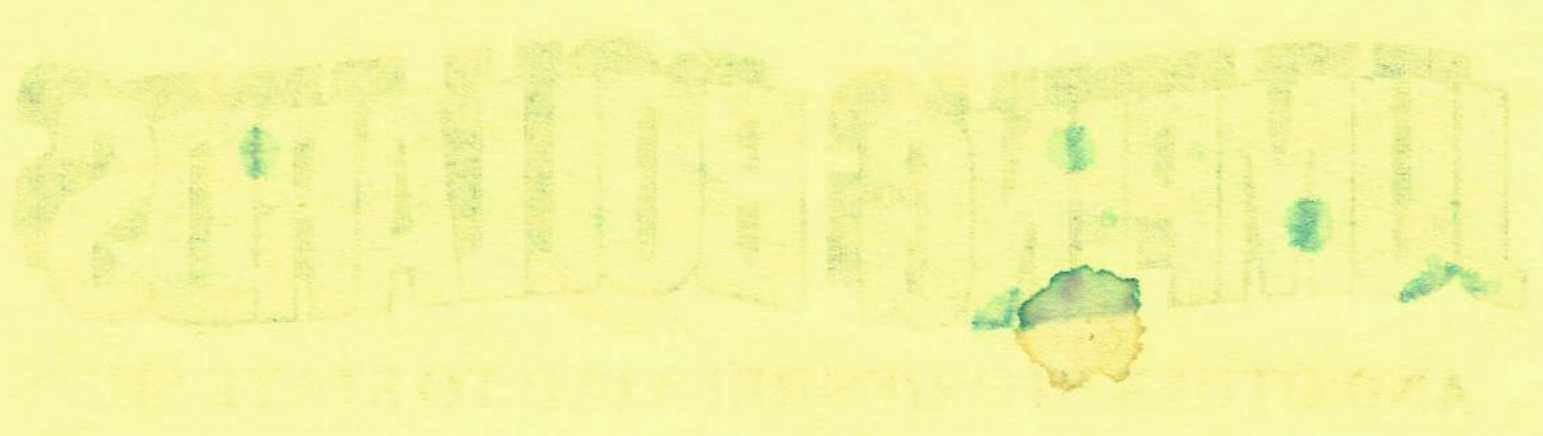


JUMPING BOLLARDS

AND OTHER STORIES RELATED TO STATE SHIPS



Max Anderson 2005





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Serving State Ships

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JUMPING BOLLARDS AND OTHER STORIES

Serving State Ships

Introduction

For the greater part of the last Century the only assured all year round transport to the north of this State was by sea.

Road transport became impossible during the wet season in the Kimberley and the cyclone season in the Pilbara. The Fitzroy River and the Ord River in flood could cut off the Kimberley for at least four months of the year.

Many of the airstrips were unsealed or unsuitable for heavy cargo carrying planes, particularly during heavy rain.

In the 1960s, whilst based at Derby I spent 5 years in the North West and the Kimberley and was heavily involved in the development and maintenance of the State Ports, which served the State Shipping Service during the State's mineral, agricultural and pastoral development of the 60s.

I also saw the demise of the State Shipping Service, which had so admirably served the North over the same period.

Adelaide Steamship Company

Prior to the inauguration of the State Shipping Service in 1912 two coastal steamers the ss Koombana and the ss Bullarra operated along the northern coast of Western Australia.

On March 20th the steamer Koombana with 138 passengers and crew, and only a small quantity of cargo left Port Hedland for Broome in a fresh north easterly, following S.S. Bullarra which was also engaged in the north west passenger and cargo trade. A couple of hours later when they altered courses a heavy north easterly gale was setting in as a cyclone swept the area. The Bullarra was badly damaged by the cyclone but was able to limp into Cossack. The Koombana was not seen again.

A search was soon organized but several vessels, which steamed over the route, she would have followed found no trace of her. More ships joined the search but by the end of the month hopes of finding her had faded. On April 3rd one of the search ships

steamed through a quantity of wreckage about 25 nautical miles north of Bedout Island and the following day more was sighted and recovered. Among the items identified were a lifeboat and stateroom door. Nothing further was retrieved although in 1973 the remains of what appeared to be a large vessel were located in deep water about 20 nautical miles off the Eighty Mile Beach.

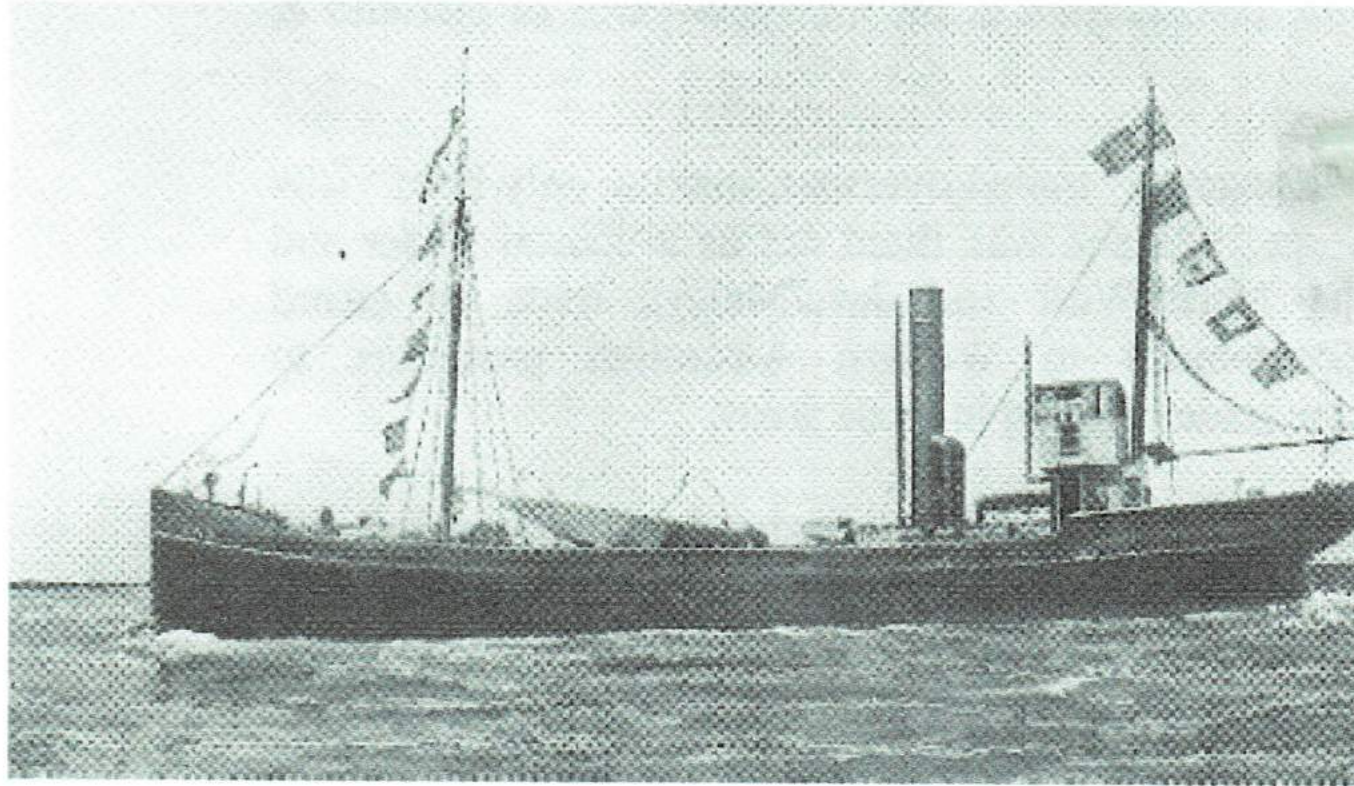
However, up to the beginning of 1994 nothing had been found. Interest in the disappearance has been maintained by the story that Mr. Abraham Davis, one of the passengers, was carrying a fortune in pearls. Just before he left for Broome he was believed to have purchased a quantity of pearls including the Roseate Pearl, then valued at twenty thousand pounds, a gem that has been linked to the violent deaths of several men. There were also claims that the ghost of Mr. Davis haunted the historic Bishop's Palace in Broome, his original home, before it was demolished in 1980. Built at Glasgow in 1908, the Koombana was a steel steamer of 3668 tonnes on dimensions of 340.1 x 48.2 x 20.8 feet. She was owned by the Adelaide Steam Ship Company and her master was Captain Allen. The cyclone also destroyed the Norwegian ship Crown Of England that was anchored off Balla Balla, Depuch Island, loading copper ore. In the high winds and seas her anchor chains parted and she was swept on to a reef off the island where huge seas soon battered her to pieces with the loss of 8 lives. Built at Workington in 1883, she was an iron ship of 1847 tonnes on dimensions of 267 x 39.1 x 23.6 feet. She was owned by Norwegian interests. The iron barque Concordia, 1308 tonnes, from Swansea, was also anchored off Balla Balla loading copper from the Whim Creek Mine, and when her chains parted in the cyclone she was forced on to the beach. When the winds abated she was high and dry and the crew were able to clamber ashore. She was later refloated and towed to Fremantle but never returned to service, finishing her days as a coal hulk. An iron vessel built at Vegesack, Germany in 1890, she measured 222.4 x 34 x 20.4 feet. Other vessels that perished in that cyclone were Enterprise, Steady, Clyo, Clara, Britannia, Karrakata, Mary, Constance and Kookie. It was estimated that about 60 lives were lost in the disaster, but only 20 bodies were recovered for burial

The State Shipping Service

A State Shipping Service was inaugurated in 1912 as a result of representations from people of the north for greater facilities for the transport of their stock and general supplies and to serve points

at which new settlement was taking place and which needed special treatment to ensure their success.

The little ship "Una," purchased for 2,000 pounds in 1912, and sold in 1917 was the first vessel in the Government line.



The SS Una of 178 tons gross, the first vessel of the State Shipping Service, provided regular calls to the isolated outports of the State from Eucla to Wyndham between 1912 and 1917.

Before the Una had completed her first round-trip between Albany and Eucla, the Government announced the purchase of the 560-ton steamer 'Wexford, which was renamed "Eucla." which was scrapped in 1926. On May 20, 1912, the Government announced the additional purchase of the steamer "Mongolia", which was renamed "Western Australia."

Her 11 hour passage from Geraldton to Fremantle still stands as a merchant ship record but she was not a suitable ship for coastal conditions. She was withdrawn from service in 1915 and later sold.

At the time the purchase of "Mongolia" was announced, arrangements were completed to purchase the 2000 ton Archibald Currie steamer "Darius", which was renamed "Kwinana."

Her career came to an end on Christmas day. 1920, when she caught fire at Carnarvon and was burnt out.

"Kwinana" was towed back to Fremantle and moored at Careening Bay. She later broke her moorings and drifted to the spot since named after her a few miles north of Rockingham.

Following withdrawal of the "Western Australia," the captured 3,000 ton German passenger steamer "Prinz Sigismund" was taken over in Brisbane and on arrival at Fremantle was renamed "Bambra."

In 1915, the 4348 ton motor vessel "Kangaroo" was purchased while still under construction at the Glasgow yards of Harland & Wolff Ltd.

For six years "Kangaroo" traded overseas, making only brief visits to Fremantle. In 1921 she was fitted out as a coastal trader and placed on the North-West and Java/Malaya trade to afford additional opportunities to Western Australian producers to participate in the trade offering in those areas.

Between 1921 and 1926, the fleet consisted of "Kangaroo" and "Bambra" on the NorthWest, Darwin and Singapore service with "Eucla" trading on the south coast.

In 1926, two new motor ships were built in the United Kingdom. - "Kybra" to replace "Eucla" and "Koolinda" to replace "Bambra."

A gradual change took place in the south coast trade during the thirties, and "Kybra" was diverted more and more to the North-West service.

From Eucla to Darwin, allowing for stoppages at the intermediate ports, represented a steaming distance of 3,500 miles. With such a long coastline and with such scattered settlement it was important that the Government had some control over the sea transport. Often the Government, through its own vessels, could give to settlers assistance that could not be asked of a Private company trading solely for profit. Thus the Government was able to give concessions to pastoralists in the way of special freights on stud stock; to farmers by special freights on fertilisers, implements, wheat, etc.; to pearlers by arranging advantageous oversea freights for their shell and to miners by specially low charges for ore transported for treatment. The wives and children of northern settlers were also granted concession fares to enable them to come south for a holiday, and provision was made for tourist parties to go to the north in order that interest in that part of the State may be stimulated amongst city dwellers. It was claimed that the Government boats had kept freights and fares generally lower than would otherwise have been the case, and that the assistance

granted has materially helped settlers and added to the attractiveness of life and development in those distant parts of the State.

Commencement of the Second World War saw the Service running three ships, Koolama, Koolinda and Kybra.

Koolama (the first of two so named), of 4068 gross tons, 362 ft length and 54 ft beam, was a twin screw cargo and 280-passenger ship, built by Wm. Denny & Bros. Newly commissioned on the Clyde in 1938, she was to become the Service's first casualty of the war. Requisitioned on 16 January 1942, she then sailed, not uneventfully, between Darwin, Koepang and Ambon on troop re-supply and civilian evacuation duties. On 29 February, whilst in Joseph Bonaparte Gulf in the vicinity of Wyndham, she was attacked and disabled by Japanese aircraft, and then beached. Later taken to Wyndham, she sank there, alongside the wharf and despite salvage pumping, on 3 March. She was scuttled just off the jetty in 1946.

Koolinda, built in 1926 by Harland & Wolff, Belfast, was of 4227 gross tons, 330 ft length and 50 ft beam. Fitted early in the war with a variety of defensive weapons, she brought some two hundred and sixty evacuees out of Darwin in December 1941, to Fremantle. After this, she continued to operate on the Western Australian coast through the war, and survived. She was sold in 1958.

Kybra, of 858 gross tons, 204 ft length and 31 ft beam, was built in 1926 by Coaster Construction Co., Montrose. Requisitioned by the Royal Australian Navy on 21 June 1940 as an anti-submarine vessel, as HMAS Kybra she was stationed on the Australian east coast, where she provided escort and radar-training support. Paid off in late 1945, and with a refit (which increased her gross tonnage to 950) she resumed her Western Australian peacetime service the following year. She was sold in 1958.

In the 1960s the bulk of sea cargo was being carried by the seven ships of the State Shipping Service, which operated at the time on the Fremantle to Darwin Run

There were four K Boats carrying passengers and cargo and three D Boats only carrying only cargo

The MV Kangaroo of 4129 tons, which was built in 1962, carried 94 passengers and cargo. It was one of the last vessels of the State Shipping Service fleet to be sold in 1973.

The MV Koolama of 3777 tons and the second of that name, built in 1958 carried 60 passengers and cargo. It was sold in 1973.

The MV Koojarra of 2959 tons carried 60 passengers and cargo

The MV Kabbarli built in 1951 was 2707 tons and carried 37 passenger and cargo

SS Delamere of 2354 tons, built in 1946 at Whyalla Shipyards, South Australia and purchased by the State Shipping Service in 1958 carried cargo only.

The SS Dulverton of 2411 tons, commissioned in 1948 carried cargo only.

The SS Dorriggo of 2320 tons carried cargo only.

There were also two vessels of the Blue Funnel Line, the Charon and the Gorgon which carried a small number of passengers and which picked up live cattle from Derby and a number of small ore carriers, one which loaded manganese ore out of Port Hedland and another which loaded silver lead zinc ore out of Derby

The Maintenance of Wharves and Jetties

The maintenance of the timber jetties in the north was an ongoing process involving the continual replacement of piles and lower structural timbers firstly as resulting from the attack of the teredo worm and secondly from the unmerciless attack of the vessels berthing alongside the jetties. The latter was no reflection on the masters who were most skilful in negotiating the strong tidal currents

Any damage to marine structures had to be fully investigated and processed for insurance purposes in a Shipping Damage Report. The claims were based on a collision report with one body being the fixed jetty structure and the other being the moving ship under the command of the Master.

Ports visited by State Ships in the 1960s

Of the seven vessels of the State Shipping Service I was very much attached to the Delamere, which I helped to build in the BHP Whyalla Shipyards in 1946.

Before the upgrading of roads and the provision of high level all weather river crossings the North the towns up north relied on the State Ships for their major supplies.

Most of the ports visited had some tidal restrictions and the ships had to wait for a favourable tide. This meant that it could take over a week to travel from Derby to Fremantle

Sometimes it was more if the ship was held up at the previous port and missed the tide

The Ships did not always call in at every port

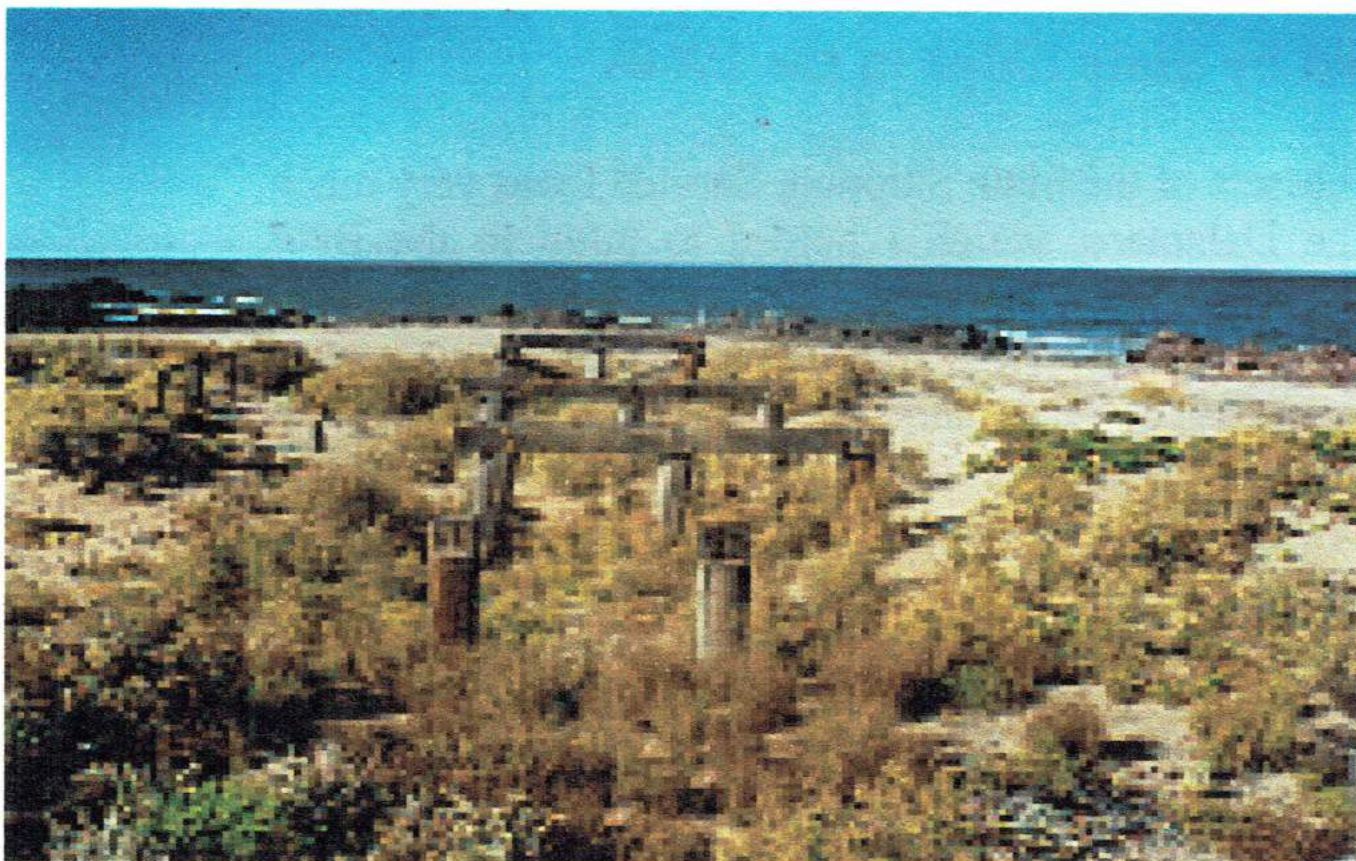
Ports

Geraldton - no tidal or current problem – a conventional land backed wharf - vessels floated at all tides.

Carnarvon - no major tidal problem but a high tide was favoured with vessels afloat at Jetty at all tides (1.5m range) It was quite common to see a red trail of discoloured water behind the ship as it snaked its way into the jetty

Onslow - the jetty was always being blown away by Cyclones (a major problem for a ship berthing). At one stage an army duck was used to handle cargo between the ship and the shore. Later a lighter was used between the ship and a landing on the foreshortened jetty. When the jetty was completely abandoned a shallow harbour berth was constructed in Beadon Creek, north of the town and the lighter operated between that and the ship.

Point Samson - Also subject to cyclones - ships berthed at Jetty and were afloat at all times - ship draft limited (5.5 m range)



The remains of the Point Samson Jetty taken in 1995

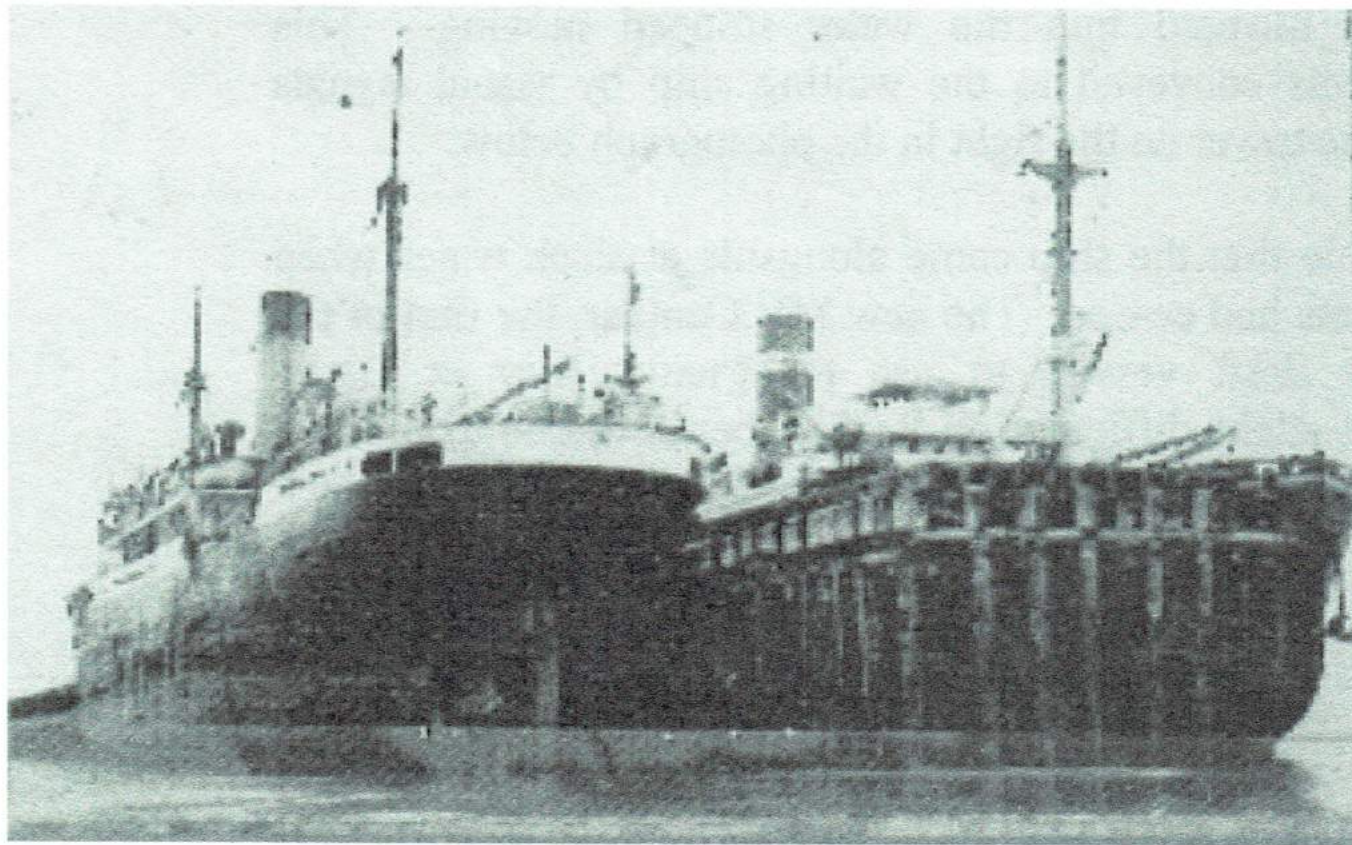
Port Hedland - Ships at jetty berth were afloat at all tides. The main constriction was a rock bar at the harbor entrance if vessels missed the tide (5.5 m range) The period to which I refer was prior to the development of Port Hedland for the export of iron ore by Goldsworthy Mining on Finucane Island and by Mount Newman at Port Hedland the development by Robe River at Cape Lambert near Point Samson and the development by Hamersley Iron at Dampier



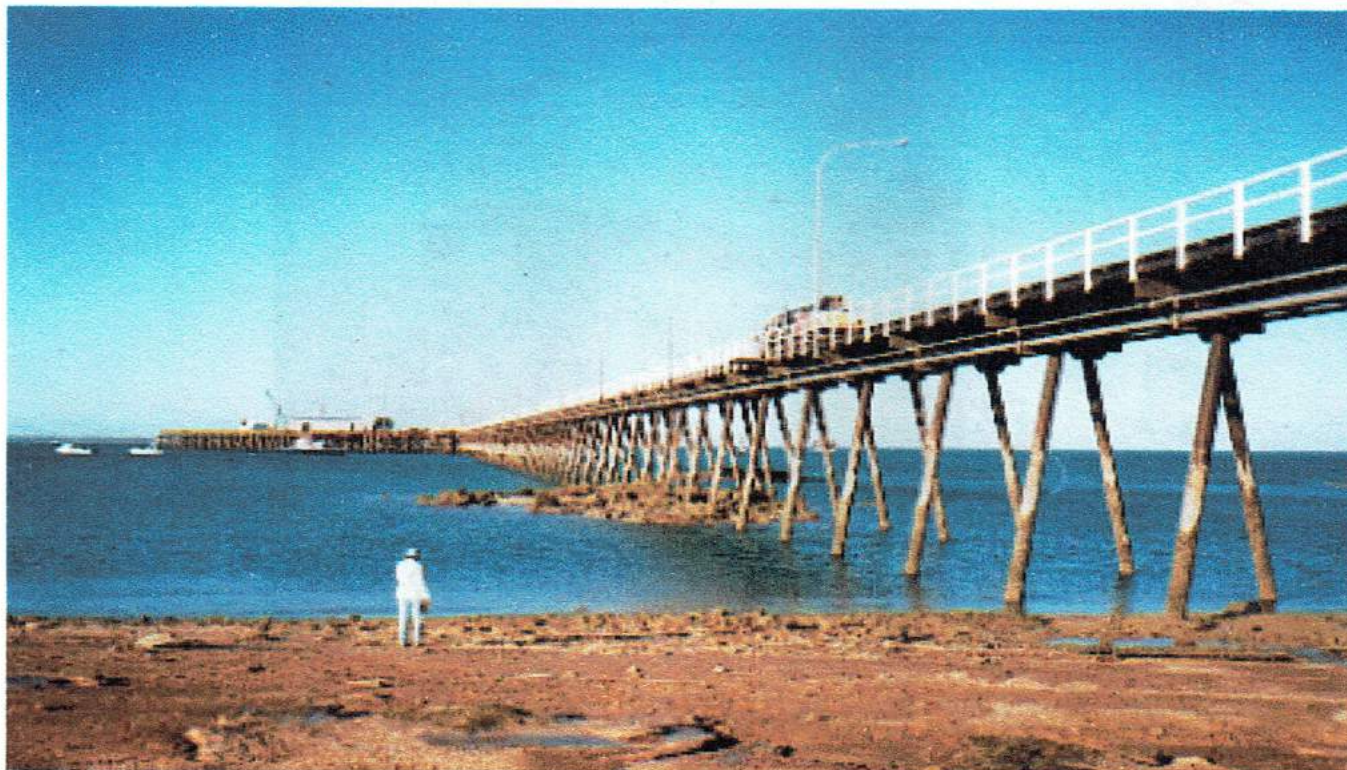
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The MV Kangaroo, on of the last vessels of the State Shipping Service at Port Hedland Jetty taken in 1961 with two of its young passengers enjoying a break in the voyage from Derby to Fremantle. The MV Kangaroo made its last trip as a passenger ship in 1973

Broome - the start of the high tidal ports. Ships relied on a high tide to enter the port and berth at the jetty and ships sat on the bottom. The tidal range in Spring Tides was up to 8.5 metres



Two ships on the sea bed at low tide at the old Broome Jetty



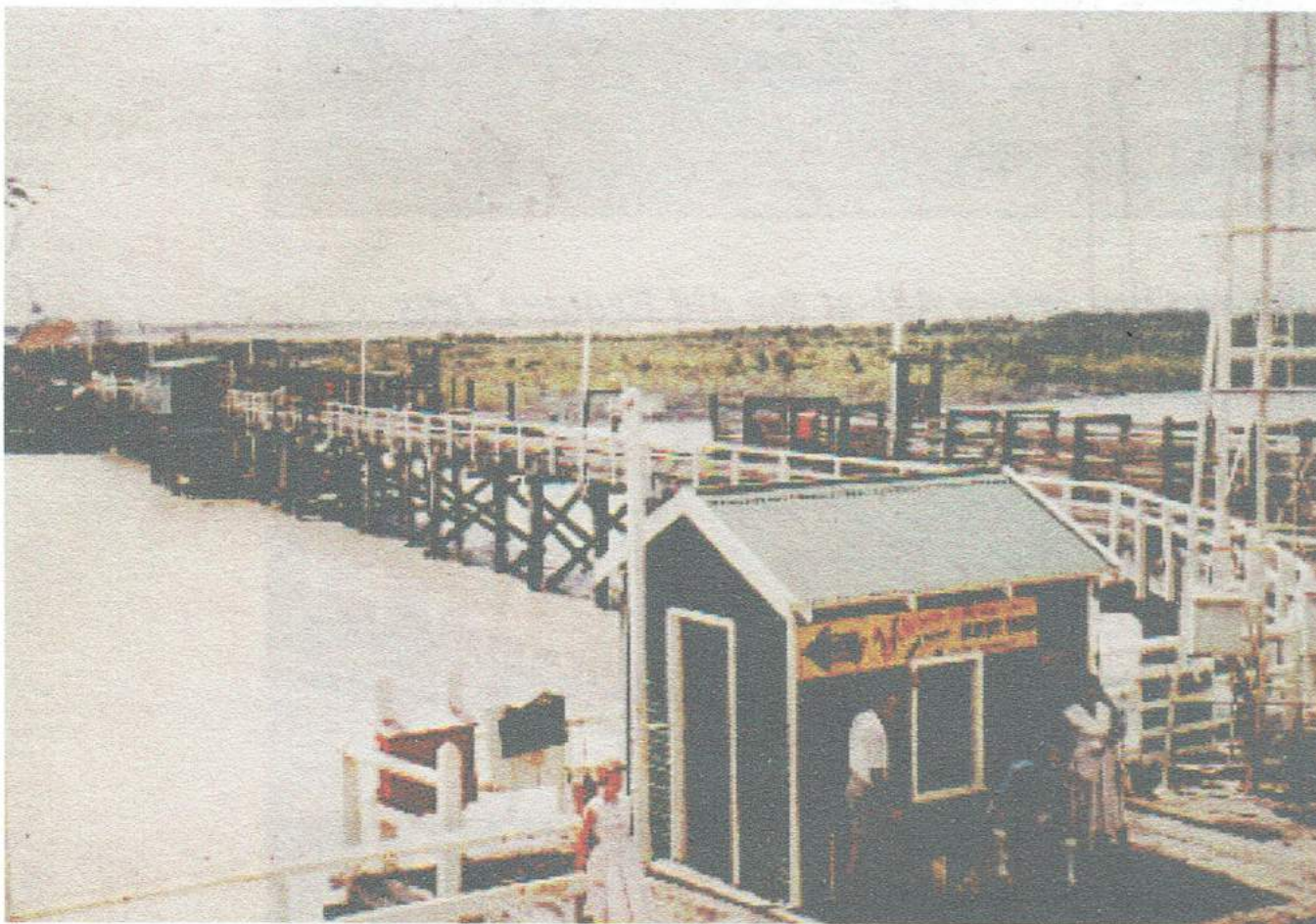
Broome Deepwater Jetty at Entrance Point taken in 1996

Derby located in King Sound, has one of the highest tides in the world. At top springs there can be a difference of 10 meters between low and high water over a period of 6 hours. The trace of a tide follows a sine curve – which it has a flat period at low and high tide at slack water and a very steep rise or fall in between.

A brisk walk is required to keep up with a rising tide if one gets caught out on the tidal flats once the tide changes.

At Derby ships like Broome had to berth and de berth at slack water high tide. The time of slack water was determined when a weighted oar lowered into the water stopped moving. This information was conveyed to the waiting ship by visual signals mounted on the tower on the right in the photograph below.

It was desirable that the ship came alongside at slack water when all tidal currents had ceased. The new MV Centaur, the first of the larger deeper draft vessels to use the “new” jetty at Derby experienced a slight difficulty on its first berthing due to the tide still flooding at keel level when surface currents indicated slack water.



The old timber jetty at Derby as viewed from the upper deck of the MV Koojarra looking along the jetty neck across the tidal flats to the town of Derby – taken in 1962



The MV Bambi loading lead, silver and zinc ore and the State Shipping Service vessel MV Koolama sitting on the sea bed at the “new” Derby Jetty – taken in 1965 shortly after the opening of the new steel and concrete jetty

Wyndham a Tidal Port - tides not as high as Derby - very strong currents in Cambridge Gulf (Tide range 7.3m)

The Koolaama 1, which was bombed by the Japanese at Cape Londonerry on 20 February 1942 during WW 11, managed to “limp” into Wyndham and “died” at the Wyndham Jetty on 3 March 1942. The wreck is still there out from jetty and causes some tidal eddies at the berth. Ships float at all tides

At one stages world wide tenders were called shortly after the war to have the wreck removed The lowest tender which came from a Japanese firm was too high and tenders were withdrawn



The port of Wyndham taken in the 1960s, with the meat. works on the right and the edge of the town on the left

Another interesting area is what happens when someone ties up a small vessel of say up to 25 feet in length to one of these jetties at high tide, goes up town for a drink and returns 6 hours later at low tide to see his small craft dangling from the jetty bollard.

State Shipping Cargo in the early 60s.

Main imports to the northern ports were food, building materials, fuel, fertilizers, furnishings, machinery, seed and breeding stock. Main exports were meat from Broome, cattle and meat from Derby, meat from Wyndham, and sheep from the Pilbara ports. Manganese ore was exported through Port Hedland, Asbestos through Point Samson and small amounts of lead silver zinc ore through Derby.

A very major export shown in the ships' manifest was empty containers - beer kegs

Another large import was timber piles and jetty timbers for repairing the jetties damage by shipping. As a matter of fact one of the main imports to Carnarvon were timber piles which were simply required to keep the jetty up to the standard required to allow ships to come alongside with more piles to keep the jetty up to the standard. and so on

The jetty was eventually closed to shipping

Problems with Ships Berthing in a Tidal Port

Three of the main problems associated with the berthing of a vessel in a tidal port, particularly where the sea bed dries out are the Strong Tidal Currents, the Short Period to Berth and sitting on the Sea Bed

Strong Tidal Currents - particularly when a vessel is preparing to berth just prior to top slack water

Some of the D Boats had trouble entering King Sound through Meda Pass at mid tide just managing to keep up with engines full ahead against an 8 knot current.

The Koojarra on one berthing at Derby got caught in the current and berthed bow in at right angles to the jetty, cutting the jetty in half

A vessel at Wyndham tried to berth behind the wharf causing a few problems

A Short period to berth - If the master leaves it too long his vessel will run out of water and the ship will be stuck out from the wharf or jetty face high and dry until the next tide

If he tries to jump the gun the strong tidal currents will take over - masters have often tend to try and beat the gun with the result that many jetties in the north were damage by a ship berthing

Sitting on the Sea Bed - When a ship is built it rests on a cradle, which take the uniformly distributed weight of the vessel

After launching the ship the weight of the vessel is more or less cradled in the water

But what happens when the ship sits on the bottom?

Vessels are designed for a certain amount of flexibility

When they come to rest on an unyielding object, all sorts of thing happen - the frames do not yield with the result that doors get jammed and people get imprisoned in cabins until the tide takes affect.

The master hopes that there is nothing under the vessel as it sits down on the sea bed one of the ships settled nicely on a large anchor, which appeared in the mud from nowhere

Using seawater for cooling is no longer available

Disposal of waste is not easy - one does not want to be walking around a ship sitting high and dry on the seabed when someone pulls the chain!

When the Derby timber jetty was replaced adjacent to the old jetty in steel and concrete it was still subject to tidal problems

One of the newer vessels the Blue Funnel Line Centaur that used the new jetty had a strengthened keel to allow it to sit on the seabed

Even so a special bed was provided on the sea floor to take the Centaur, which had to be checked regularly at low tide before, during and after berthing

The Current Position

There is now no regular shipping service to the North

Geraldton - serving mainly the agricultural and mineral export trade.

Carnarvon - closed to shipping

Onslow - closed to shipping

Point Samson - closed to shipping

Port Hedland - still used by shipping

Broome - still used by shipping - the old timber jetty was replaced by a deepwater jetty at Entrance: Point - it is noted that it was able to take the 76,000 tonne passenger ship Virgo

Derby - was closed to shipping for some time – now takes barges for shipping lead zinc ores out to a bulk carrier moored in the Sound

Wyndham - still used for shipping – the port for Kununurra – Ord River

Some Anecdotes relevant to Shipping Movements

The following anecdotes are based on incidents in which I was involved appertaining to shipping movements in and out of the ports in the north of the State during the period I was based in Derby.

Unloading at Derby Jetty

The original Derby Jetty was a timber piled and timber beam structure with a timber deck. It was L shaped, with the long part of the L being the approach neck and the short part of the L being the berthing head. There was only one berth, which was the outside of the short leg. Inward and outward cargo was unloaded and loaded

by ships gear and was transported by rail between the Jetty head and the goods yard ashore. Berthing of vessels at the Jetty had to be carried out at high tide and when there was slack water for only a few minutes. Once the vessel was moored along side, it was necessary for the rope springs holding the vessel against the jetty face, to be slackened off as the tide dropped. The berthing of a ship in tidal ports requires some split second timing, not only for the maintaining of water under the keel during the berthing operation but also having to combat the tidal currents, whilst berthing. It is for this reason that the ship's master often tries to keep some power up his sleeve should it be suddenly needed at the last moment. There was an incident at Derby, when a State Shipping vessel came in too quickly and was not able to straighten up, with the result that the bow of the ship almost cut the head in half.

The impact was so great that the transverse decking on the approach neck started to concertina and the unloading gangs waiting on the Jetty were knocked off their feet. The wharfing at the time was Alec Norton, who was also waiting on the Jetty. There was this ship sitting more than half way in and at right angles to the berth face. All Alec did, once he regained his feet, was to yell out to the Captain, high above him up on the bridge, "Hell. That was some berthing. Which side do you want to unload first?"

Jumping Bollards

Most of the masters on the passenger ships never showed their other side to the passengers, if they could help it. Most of them could swear and curse as well as any landlubber but in front of the passengers they were most correct and polite. Bringing a vessel alongside a jetty in tidal ports was always hazardous, particularly when tidal currents were running. These could suddenly take over the vessel, throwing several thousand tons of ship against the face of the Jetty, resulting in the loud crash of snapping jetty timbers.

When the ship was about to berth, the passengers would crowd to the railings on the top deck to watch the berthing of the vessel, probably hoping for some excitement. The master up on the bridge would be shouting commands to his crew and also the line gang down on the Jetty below. At the same time he would be aware of his captive audience on the deck just below him. Once the first line was secured and the springs winched into position, the

captain would proceed to direct the mooring gang as to where he wanted the next mooring.

During the course of maintenance of the jetties in the north I would often have to send material from one port to the other. This material would be placed at the berth and loaded on to the ship with the ship's gear and offloaded at the next port. One of the items, which were often lifted, were the heavy cast iron bollards used for mooring the vessel alongside the berth. The bollards were fixed by long countersunk bolts passing through the base of the bollard and bolted to the heavy jetty timbers. On this particular occasion I had arranged for a spare bollard held in stock at Derby to be shipped to Wyndham on the Kangaroo to provide an additional mooring on the Wyndham jetty. The loose bollard had been placed on the deck of the jetty near the Jetty face in such a position so it could be lifted up with ship's gear on to the vessel.

The line gang on the Jetty knew that this was to be loaded on before the ship departed. In due course the MV Kangaroo arrived at the Derby Jetty with all its passengers lining the top deck to watch yet another berthing. The ship was secured aft and Captain Harold Evans high up on the bridge started directing the line gang down below. Every time the mooring gang started to attach the line to a bollard, Harold would call out, " No. Not that one. That one," pointing to the Wyndham bound bollard sitting on the deck, the gang called back that it was not fixed to the jetty. Harold did not hear them but kept insisting that the line be placed as he directed. So they did. The result was that the heavy cast iron bollard did a short dance along the jetty as the full weight of the Kangaroo heaved on the line. That time the captain said a few words, which were not normally the type he used at his dinner table.

His passengers who had been watching the proceedings from the top deck with some enjoyment were quite impressed.

The Royal Visit at Broome

In April 1963, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth 11 made a visit to Broome aboard the Royal Yacht Britannia, which was escorted by the State Ship Koojarra under the command of Captain Roy Marsh. It was proposed that the Royal Yacht would moor in Roebuck Bay and that her Majesty would come ashore at Broome by the Royal Barge, which would tie up at the Broome Jetty. Due

to the large tidal variations at Broome and the general state of the old timber Jetty it was necessary that special structural and aesthetic modifications be made to the Jetty.

As the officer responsible for the maintenance of ports in the North West and Kimberley areas of the State, it became my duty to arrange for the necessary work to be carried out. In order to accommodate the Royal Barge, a special landing was constructed at the end of the Jetty such that the landing level and the deck of the Royal Barge were the same over the rise and fall of the tide during the few hours Her Majesty would be on shore. Accurate tidal predictions and meteorological information was obtained several weeks prior to the visit together with the Broome Itinerary, which enabled the required deck level of the landing to be established.

The visit was fortunately made during neap tides, when the daily tidal range was least. If I remember correctly, the landing was set at 11 feet above low water to coincide with what the deck level of the Royal Barge would be when Her Majesty alighted from it at the scheduled time and on the scheduled day. Her Majesty was to be met at the end of the three quarter mile length Jetty with the Royal entourage, consisting of several vehicles specially brought up from Perth for the special occasion. In order to take the vehicles it was necessary to place timber decking longitudinally over the full length of the Jetty. The Queen duly arrived in the Royal Barge and alighted at the specially prepared landing, over which coir matting had been placed. She then climbed the short flight of steps up and onto the Jetty, was ushered into her vehicle and driven down the Jetty, through the streets of Broome to the reception committee waiting for her at the Broome Shire Hall.

As soon as the Royal entourage disappeared down the jetty, some of the jetty gang swiftly retrieved the coir matting from the landing and the steps as the incoming tide once again started to inundate the structure. After one hour the tide peaked and started to drop again. Immediately it started to fall, the men were out with bass brooms, following the tide down and removing any mud deposits from the steps and landing. As the water receded, the coir matting was run down the steps on to the landing in preparation for her Majesty's departure. At precisely 2 hours after the Royal entourage left the Jetty it returned. The Royal Barge had in the meantime, berthed at the landing. Her Majesty alighted from her vehicle, walked down the few coir mat clad steps onto the landing

and boarded the Barge, probably never ever knowing what had transpired during the two hours she was ashore and probably quite convinced, unlike King Canute, that the tide stood still for her during her Broome visit.

The Stolen Lugger Incident

One morning I had a visit from the Officer in Charge of the Derby Police Station, saying, that he had received a radio report from the State Shipping vessel, Koojarra. He said that the ship's master had advised that his vessel had been fired upon near Point Torment, in King Sound about twenty miles or so north of Derby. The sergeant told me that he had also received another report that a lugger had been reported stolen from Broome during the last week and he felt the two incidents might be related.

The most suitable sea transport in Derby at that time was the department's forty five feet length work boat, MV Warren and which the sergeant now wished to take over and go immediately to Point Torment and arrest the alleged stolen lugger and crew. He advised me that he felt there could be some gun play and suggested that I warn my launch driver what to expect. The launch driver wasn't the least concerned and said that he thought it could be fun.

The launch driver then fueled up and the sergeant returned to the police station to pick up the rest of the Derby police force. A short time later he returned with three other constables all armed with .303 rifles. Before boarding the launch they oiled the bolt of each rifle with grease taken from the axle boxes of a rail wagon parked out on the Jetty and then fired several test shots out over the sound towards Mary Island.

They then proceeded to board the launch, which by now was taking on the appearance of a gunboat. It was just as the vessel was pulling away from the landing that the thought suddenly struck me that the town of Derby would now be without a police force. Half in fun I shouted out - "who will be in charge, while you are away?" The reply came back from the sergeant saying, "You will be."

The workboat slowly turned away from the Jetty and headed north down the sound. In no time it was hidden by the mangroves as it continued on its way to a rendezvous near Point Torment. As the

day wore on I was becoming a little concerned as I had received no report from the Warren and neither could I raise it by radio.

When the day was approaching "last light", I contacted the Department of Civil Aviation, Derby to see if there were any planes, which were or had been over the Point Torment area and to find out if they had spotted two small craft in that area of King Sound. Shortly afterwards I received a telephone call in my office from Dixie Goddard of DCA advising me that Dick Robertson who was returning from Koolan Island in his Cessna had spotted two vessels slowly moving up the sound and that one appeared to be in tow. At the height he was flying and in the failing light he was unable to distinguish which vessel was the lugger and which was our workboat.

Elsa and I then returned to the jetty to await the arrival of the "convoy". Shortly, we picked out two faint lights in the darkness of the Sound and the steady throbbing of a diesel engine. A little while later the Warren towing a lugger came into view. It eventuated that the lugger was not a stolen one but one on charter from Broome. Apparently the crew who had gone fishing in the Sound had broken down near Point Torment, and then beset by tidal problems, mosquitoes and no radio had tried to attract attention to their plight by firing a shot over the bow of the Koojarra as it passed them some distance away. The outcome to all this was a very relieved lugger crew, a tired constabulary and a very disappointed launch driver.

As a follow on to this incident there were two other stories as told by the police and the stranded mariners, which are worth relating. The police party, suspecting that the lugger they were seeking had been taken over by an armed crew decided to take no chances and got the launch driver to cut the motor some distance from the lugger. One of the more not so intrepid young policeman had suggested to his superior that it might be better if they were all to stay below deck and creep up on the gang. The sergeant thought otherwise. He and his three constables, arms at the ready stood up on the deck at the bow of the launch. ready to engage the crew of the lugger in battle. I am not sure what commands the sergeant gave but I presume it would have been something along the lines of, "We are coming alongside to board your vessel, throw down your arms and come up on deck with your hands in the air." The story from the marooned crew of the lugger was that they had hit on the idea that morning of firing some shots over the bow of a

vessel to attract attention. They had then waited down below deck. Later in the afternoon of the same day, they heard in the distance the sound of an engine and then suddenly silence.

On looking in the direction on from which the sound had come they were amazed to see an unmarked vessel with a number of men in khaki dress and holding rifles, standing on the bow of the vessel which was slowly drifting towards them. They said that some one in the party called out to them something about laying down their arms and to come up on the deck with their hands in the air. One of the crew on the lugger told me that he thought they were about to be boarded by pirates. He said were they relieved, when they heard the message repeated preceded with "police here."

The Black Rocks Air Drop

In the late 1950s the State Government engaged the engineering consulting firm of Maunsells and Partners to investigate suitable deep water port sites in the West Kimberley area. One of the sites investigated was at Black Rocks, 15 miles or so north of Derby and on the eastern side of King Sound. A test pile had been driven at the site by the department and at one stage a tide recorder had been installed. It was considered, however that rather than carry out any development in this area that the old timber jetty at Derby be replaced in steel.

On the suggestion of my chief in head office, I decided that I should have a look at the test pile to see how it had fared over the several years that it had been in the ground. I therefore decided that one day when the tides were near top springs that I, with two other engineers, a surveyor and the launch driver should make the short trip to Black Rocks. The tidal range in any one day in King Sound could be as much as 36 feet and it was essential that we leave the Derby Jetty on the rising tide to allow us to arrive at Black Rocks somewhere close to high tide. This would give us some time to follow the pile a part of the way down with the tide and see what deterioration had taken place before setting off back to Derby. We had to allow sufficient time to ensure that when we arrived back at Derby we would still be able to disembark at the jetty before the berth dried out. We had about six hours for the "expedition".

Unfortunately we left the departure from Black Rocks too late and started to run out of water on an uncharted sand bank less than a mile from the test pile site. At first we thought we had struck a submerged object, when the boat suddenly started to rise out of the water. Some one then jumped overboard and found that the water was less than waist deep. In another minute it was only thigh deep and in no time hardly covered the ankles. We were stuck on a sand bank miles from shore in King Sound. In a little over six hours there would be about 20 feet of water over this spot. We were concerned that the workboat having an open cockpit and not designed to sit squarely on the seabed would keel over on its side once all flotation was lost. It was likely that the boat would then start to fill with water on the incoming tide, which would not have been desirable. In the short time available after we hit the bank we removed the engine cover and the slatted seats and used them as props to hold the vessel in an upright position.

At the stage of hitting the bank, and while we were still afloat the launch driver had tried to edge the vessel over the high spot by putting full power on the engine. This type of vessel had been designed for towing and had a large diameter propeller. The result of his efforts was to dig a thirty feet length trench in the order of six feet deep at the rear of the launch. This was to no avail and we were still stuck high and dry as the water around us continued to recede. Across the mud flats and to the east was a low line of mangroves defining the eastern shores of the Sound, and across the sand banks to the west were the remaining waters of the Sound, which were quickly being replaced by mud flats. To the north was a line of mangroves extending over mud flats towards the Point Torment light and to the south, some distance away was Derby. As the tide continued to fall, we began to realize that we must be now stranded on the largest sand bank in King Sound. We also appreciated that we would have to remain here for at least six more hours until the tide fell to its lowest and rose again. We then settled down to wait for the tide, spending most of the time floating on our backs in the only remaining pool of water, the trench, which had been dug at the stern of the boat. On that particular day the temperature was well over 110 degrees Fahrenheit and in no time the small pool in which we had taken respite from the heat became quite hot. In the meantime, back at Derby; when we did not turn up at the specified time, the foreman decided that we must have broken down and were stranded somewhere in the Sound.

He immediately contacted Dick Robertson, who had one of the air charter companies in Derby and who flew over the site to see what had happened. The first thing we knew of the foreman's concern was when we saw Dick's Cessna come out of the blue and swoop low over us. We duly waved to him that we were OK and he turned the Cessna around and returned to Derby. In a short time he returned and flying at quite a low height tossed several packages out of the plane. They turned out to be a can of water, several packages of sandwiches and a carton of beer. As it was we did have plenty of water on board but no food or beer. The beer was icy cold. On the way down the carton broke open and for a short time it rained cans of beer. No one was hit and all the beer was drunk.

After we had been on the sand bank for three hours the tide turned and after another few hours, the vessel started to float. We immediately retrieved our makeshift props, started the engine and wended our way back to Derby. It was one incident we would never live down. The engineers in the party were supposed to be experts on tides, hydrographic surveying and navigational charts and to be caught as we were was a real "no no."

Crocodiles

All the time we were stranded on that sand bank near Black Rocks the thought of crocodiles never entered my head. Although I was in the Kimberley for over five years and spent a large amount of my time near the habitat of salt-water crocodiles I must confess that I never confronted one and was never confronted by one. Their presence in the mangroves could often be detected by their tracks. They use to frequent the Jetty area and I believe several large ones had been seen in the mud around the Jetty when the tide was out. One of the ships, which used to call into Derby, was the Centaur of the Blue Funnel Line. The keel of the Centaur had been specially strengthened to allow the vessel to sit on the seabed, when the tide was out. It was essential that the weight of the vessel was distributed uniformly over the seabed and regular inspections were made by either the master of the vessel, or myself once the berth dried out, to see how the ship was sitting.

Not all low tides were during day light hours and sometimes the inspection had to be made at nighttime using a powerful spot light. Captain Glen Williams, who was the master of the Centaur at the time, told me how late one night he decided to check the seabed

around the keel. He said that he threw a rope ladder over the side and descended the 30 feet or so in to the inky blackness of the seabed. Then with his torch, lighting up the underside of his ship he slowly started to plod his way through the black sticky mud along the berth face. He told me that suddenly he had a strange feeling that he was being watched by something. He quickly turned around and shone his torch in the direction from which he had come. All he could see were two red glowing embers. He said he realized that it was a crocodile probably slowly stalking him as he walked around the vessel. His immediate aim was to get back to that rope ladder as quickly as possible. And that rope ladder was somewhere between him and the crocodile. He retraced his steps, as quickly as he could, through the knee-deep mud. He said that when he reached the rope ladder, he practically ran up the side of the ship to the safety of the deck.

The district engineer at Derby, David Pettersson, used to make several trips to Wyndham. On one of these trips he had to carry out an inspection of the King River pools, which was the water supply for Wyndham. The King River flowed into Cambridge Gulf a few miles south of Wyndham and there were several natural freshwater pools in the river, from which the water was pumped to Wyndham.

On this particular day it was very hot. David drove out to the King River pumping station, parked his vehicle and commenced a several mile walk over rock and spinifex country to the top end of the last pool, where he able to cross over a part of the dry river bed and proceed back along the other side. By the time he had done his inspection, he was back to where he had parked his car except it was on the other side of the river. He said that he had the choice of either retracing his steps in the almost unbearable heat back to the top of the last pool and down to his vehicle or else swim the few yards over the river. He said that the river looked so cool and inviting and he was bloody hot. He decided on the latter, dived in and was almost half way across the river, when he suddenly thought of crocodiles. Cambridge Gulf and the lower reaches of the rivers that flow into it are the home of salt-water crocodiles. David said he was half inclined to swim back to the riverbank, which he had just left but realized that he had reached the point of no return. In no time he reached the other side, swimming, he said more out of water than in it. He reckoned that as he scrambled up the bank, he was sure that several shapes were taking to the water from the side he had just left.

Some of the gang at the Public Works camp at Camballin had quite a lucrative sideline, by catching small freshwater crocodiles in large pools in the Fitzroy River, killing them and stuffing them for sale to tourists. The method they used for snaring the freshies was to unwind a large roll of wire netting in a waist deep pool to completely enclose a large part of the pool. The netting would then be wound up from one end, decreasing the size of the enclosure and trapping any crocodiles. unable to escape. Apparently no one lost any toes carrying out this completely illegal exercise.

Those stories were true. There are other stories concerning crocodiles, which might be questionable. A friend of mine in Derby told me how one day when he was returning from Broome he came across a small crocodile on the road near Lange Crossing, which had apparently been run over. He stopped to investigate and found that it was devouring its own entrails. He said that he understood that these reptiles had a very poor nervous system and did not have a high sense of pain. He then left the crocodile enjoying its meal and carried on to Derby. He said that after a few miles down the road he began to speculate as to what would be the outcome of this crocodile eating itself. He said he wondered how it would end up. He decided that he would have to go back along the road to see what had happened to the crocodile.

When he arrived back at the place where he had left the crocodile making a real guts of itself, he was surprised but not unexpectedly to find that the crocodile was no longer there. It was quite simple he said, "If the crocodile kept eating himself, there would be nothing left of him and he would just disappear."

The other story concerns a discussion; a group of us had one Sunday morning over a few beers as to the difference between salt water and fresh water crocodiles and why most animals open their mouth by dropping their lower jaw, whereas crocodiles open their mouth by raising the upper jaw. It was appreciated that the blunt nosed crocodiles were salt water ones and the ones with the long snout were freshwater ones. The salt-water crocodiles would always bite you. The freshwater ones didn't bite. To assist in the discussion, one of our party had brought along a baby crocodile, which he had placed in a basin of water. He then proceeded to explain to us "why it was so", by using one of his fingers to point to that part of the crocodile's anatomy under discussion. The crocodile obviously didn't like this attention and made a grab at the

finger and hung on. It wasn't a bad bite but it needed medical attention. The unfortunate part about this episode was that the baby crocodile died a few days later of suspected alcoholic poisoning.

A State Ship Arrival

Much of our life at Derby centred on the arrival of ships and planes. The State Shipping Service brought in the more bulky supplies, which included beer. MacRobertson Millar Airlines brought in all the perishables, such as fruit, tomatoes, lettuces and other vegetables. They also provided the main form of transport in and out of Derby during the wet season. A story was often told of how the beer would always be stacked at the bottom of the hold or freezer to ensure that the other cargo had to be taken off first.

In the 1960s the State Shipping Service line had seven vessels operating on the Fremantle to Darwin run. They included the general cargo vessels, Dorriga, Dulverton and Delamere and the passenger/" cargo vessels, Kangaroo, Koolama, Koojarra and Kabbarli. Subject to the cargo and passenger requirements the ships made calls to the ports of Geraldton, Carnarvon, Onslow, Point Samson, Port Hedland, Broome, Derby, Wyndham and Darwin. The arrival of one of the passenger ships at Derby was always a great event, particularly in the wet season. There was no air conditioning in the town and to step on board one of the K boats and enter the ship's lounge was like walking into a freezer. It was absolutely heavenly. The worse part was when one left the confines of the air conditioning and came up on deck to go ashore. The hot moist air, mingled with the permanent smell of rotting vegetation invaded the nostrils and felt as if one was being enveloped by a hot steamy blanket. The sudden change from cold dry air to hot moist air also gave the impression that it was starting to rain. This of course was due to the very high humidity playing havoc with the senses. After a short time the body adjusted itself again to the outside temperature and humidity.

Holidays on State Ships

In the 1960's government wages employees were given leave and transport paid to and from Perth every two years. Staff employees were more fortunate. They were given four weeks leave each year with return fares to Perth for both the employee and his family, paid for by the department. Generally the employee and his family

would travel down to Perth by ship and return by air. The time spent in getting to Perth and returning from Perth was included as normal paid working time. The passenger ships usually called into most of the ports on the southern run picking up passengers from ports between Derby and Fremantle. Consequently the trip down would take anything between seven and ten days. As most of the ports were tidal, the ship would have to catch both the tide for berthing and departure.

We were fortunate that we were able to make several trips on the K boats when proceeding on leave to Perth. One memorable trip was from Derby to Fremantle via Darwin. It was during the Xmas and New Year Holiday period and by taking a few days from my annual leave we were able to spend a day or two at Darwin, living on board the ship before leaving for Fremantle. On that particular trip we were on board the Koolama for about two weeks. The ship's master was Fred Jardine, a very dour Scot, whose favourite tune was "The Scottish Soldier", and which was being played constantly in some part of the ship. His favourite food was not the Haggis, as I found out on New Years Day. We were guests at his table, when the chief steward and the cook proudly ushered in this foul smelling piece of cold porridge, which they proudly announced to the Captain was Haggis, on a large silver platter. Fred Jardine politely asked his other guests, if they would like to try some. From my point of view, eating haggis on a rolling pitching heaving ship on the day after a New Years Eve party was not desirable. Everybody at the table thought the same way. So did Fred Jardine. He suggested to his chief steward and the cook that perhaps they might like to try some of the haggis on the other tables in the dining saloon.

Loading Cattle

Two of the main exports over the Derby jetty were empty containers and cattle. The empty containers as listed in the ships manifest were empty beer kegs. Live cattle were driven overland along the West Kimberley stock routes or else brought by road train to Mayalls bore and cattle yards, a few miles out of Derby and then driven around the tidal flats to the mile long cattle race leading to the Jetty. At the jetty the cattle were held in stockyards and then driven down a single beast race along the neck of the jetty via a hinged walkway onto the ship. The walkway, which was hinged at the jetty end, rested on the deck of the ship and went up and down with the tide.

During the building of the new jetty at Derby, which was located adjacent to the old one, the port operation had to continue in the middle of a construction area. This required close liaison between the port operator and the Jetty builder. One of the problems was the handling of cattle in temporary races and through construction areas. At the jetty end of the race was a large silver painted fuel tank, at which the cattle, on their way down south to market would tend to balk. There was a suggestion that perhaps it should be painted a softer colour, so the cattle would not be startled by it. However, one of the local businessmen, possibly of Irish descent considered that there would be no need to paint the tank, because he said that, in time the cattle would get used to it.

The Exodus during the Wet

During the "wet" season, now generously referred to as the "green" season, most people would try and go south for a part of the time, if at all possible. Some flew out but many chose to go by ship. Life on board the K boats was in some ways, the best part of the break from Derby. All of the passengers would have known each other and shipboard life was a very friendly social affair. There were no swimming pools on the ship but this was compensated by a visit nearly every day to a port where one could at least get wet. Children made a very large part of the passenger list and everybody kept an eye on them. Young boys balancing on the rail on the lower aft deck was not encouraged. I remember one of the ladies from Derby, who was travelling with her five very young children made a point of continually counting them while at the same time trying to join in shipboard activities. However, State Shipping Service used to boast that they had never lost a child overboard. Apart from the normal deck games as deck golf and quoits, the crew used to show pictures on the aft deck on most nights. There was also the attraction of the bar or just sitting in a Koolama chair on the top deck, sipping an icy cold drink and watching the rest of the world go by.

The Cattle Race

The cattle loading set up with the old jetty was that cattle were driven around the tidal flats, south of the town, down a mile and a quarter causeway to holding yards on reclaimed land near the foot of the timber Jetty. The causeway, which also carried the rail -way line from the Jetty to the goods yard ashore, provided the only road

access to the Jetty. Under the changed set up, a separate road access to the Jetty was being provided along the upgraded existing causeway. A cattle race of 3,300 feet length was to be constructed over the tidal flats south of the roadway, together with cattle holding yards adjacent to the south neck of the Jetty.

The new yards and races were built of steel uprights with timber rails. The races were tapered in cross section, with the narrow part being at ground level. The idea was to prevent any beasts from turning around in the race and stopping the smooth run of the cattle between the holding yards and the ship.

As a safety precaution, the race was broken in several places to allow anyone caught in the race to quickly escape from a pending "stampede". The escape sections were known as man escapes and their dimension on plan were to be determined by the width of the largest person who would have occasion to be in the race. To obtain this information we had a pair of calipers made, which we used on all the locals, so that I could fix this measurement before proceeding with the erection of the steel portal frames in the cattle race.

The winner was a well-known businessman, station owner and Road Board Chairman Bob Rowell.

Derby Jetty Construction

Under a multi million pound Commonwealth assisted port development programme, new jetties and port facilities were to be provided at Wyndham, Derby and Broome, the three major ports of the Kimberley region. The new Derby jetty was built on the southern side of the existing timber jetty. The new jetty comprised of a 758 feet long curved approach, 26 feet wide, leading to a 516 feet long berth, located in approximately the same depth of water as that at the old Jetty. At the southern end of the berth an 18 feet wide structure led back to the shore. This structure carried a roadway for the in and out movements of Jetty traffic and a cattle race to a loading ramp on the jetty. Along the same alignment of the berth and to the south, there were two dolphins, which allowed two coastal ships of up to 300 feet in length to be berthed at the same time.

Apart from the abutment piles all the tubular steel piles in the structure were pitched and driven using floating plant, the steel

super structure was placed using jib cranes working from the partly completed jetty deck. Due to the tidal variations at the jetty, it was only possible to maneuver the pile-driving barge and drive piles whilst there was still flotation. The whole area over which the piles were to be driven dried out completely at low tide and all floating plant sat on the dry seabed until the next tide. There were two tides a day, which ranged from a top of 36 feet down to zero feet during Spring tides and from about 25 feet down to 10 feet or slightly less in neap tides.

Wyndham Jetty Construction 1960

The driving of the steel tubular piles on the Wyndham Jetty was carried out using a 65 feet high steel pile frame, mounted on a barge. All other equipment as the boiler, piling and mooring winches was also located on the deck of the barge. The barge used at Wyndham consisted of a number of 13'6" x 5'6" x 5'6" Braithewaite boxes bolted together to form one large pontoon.

There were also a couple of sheds set up on the barge together with wire slings, mooring wires and other equipment associated with the driving of the steel piles. The deck of the barge was therefore pretty well cluttered, apart from one area on which a large red and white bull's-eye was painted. This was the "no go" area, where things like wire slings, shackles, twitches etc were dropped from the landings on the pile frame to the deck below. The Resident Engineer on the jetty construction, Jim Butcher, who had a very dry sense of humour recounted to me how one morning, quite early, he had been called down to the Jetty to view, the pile driving barge which had somehow or other, overnight lost all its equipment off the deck.

The barge had been moored just off the jetty. Jim said that all that was left was a clear steel deck, even the painted bulls eye had been removed. Then he said that it suddenly dawned on him that, the equipment had not been stolen. It was still on the barge. It was just that the barge had flipped over 180 degrees and all the equipment and the pile frame were dangling down into the brown murky depths of Cambridge Gulf just off the wreck of Koolama 1. What he was now looking at was the clean uncluttered surface of the underside of the pontoon.

This was a major catastrophe in the building of the Jetty. Apparently water had entered several of the boxes on the port side of the pontoon causing it to list to such an extent that the

metacenter took over from the centre of gravity and flipped the barge over on its back. The up righting of the barge involved some very hazardous diving work in the reballasting of some of the boxes and the recovering of equipment hanging from the upturned barge.

Acknowledgements

North of the 26th 1979

A collection of writings edited by Helen Weller including
Ships by Jean Haynes

State Shipping Service 50th Anniversary Brochure 1962

Western Australia - State Education Department 1925

Photographs

SS Una
(page 5)

State Ships records

Two ships at the old Broome Jetty Grace Moynes
(page 11)

all others by Max Anderson

Sea Ports and Airports
Western Australia and
Northern Territory 1960
Excluding Bunbury and
Fremantle

